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**RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION**

Political platforms which promote or incite racial discrimination

**Updated study by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary
forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and
related intolerance, Doudou Diène***

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* This document is submitted late so as to include the most up-to-date information possible.

Summary

The present study is submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/36 (para. 17) on the incompatibility between democracy and racism, in which the Commission invited the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to review and further expand the study on the question of political platforms which promote or incite racial discrimination and to submit it to the Commission at its sixty-second session. This document constitutes a preliminary study owing to the limited number of replies received from Member States and the fact that a workshop on this subject will be held in Brazil in April 2006, which will provide more exhaustive data. The Special Rapporteur submits a provisional report herewith to be followed by a more complete report after the Workshop.

This intermediate report confirms the significant tendencies identified in the previous report, such as the normalization of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia for political ends, the penetration of the racist political platforms of extreme right-wing parties and movements in the political programmes of democratic parties and the growing intellectual legitimization of these platforms. This new and particularly alarming phenomenon affects those tendencies through a "lowering of the guard" on the part of Governments in the fight against racism and the acceptance of open racism in large sectors of the populations of many countries. Racism therefore constitutes the greatest threat to democracy.

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Introduction

1.   The present study is submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/36 (para. 17) on the incompatibility between democracy and racism, in which the Commission invited the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to review and further expand the study on the question of political platforms which promote or incite racial discrimination and to submit it to the Commission at its sixty-second session.

2.   This document constitutes a preliminary study for two reasons: firstly, the limited number of replies from Member States[1] does not provide an overall, comparative grasp of the phenomenon, and secondly a workshop on the same subject is to be held in Brazil in April 2006 as part of the Americas Conference, offering further and more detailed data and the inputs of researchers from all the regions, which would make it possible to submit a more complete report at a later date. In this document the Special Rapporteur will focus on analysing the intellectual and ideological background to the issues of racism and democracy. The experts invited to the April meeting will be considering the document together with a compilation of the data and information provided by Member States.

3.   For the purposes of this study, the expression "political platforms which promote or incite racial discrimination" is defined as all political ideologies, statements, programmes or strategies that advocate racial discrimination or racial hatred and xenophobia in order to enable certain groups to gain political power and to marginalize others in any given country.

4.   Racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia provide significant indicators not only of the degree of a society's internal social cohesion but also of the nature of the system of values by which that society is governed. The general resurgence of racism, which is appearing in new forms as well as in more acute traditional forms, may therefore be taken, at the start of this third millennium, to reflect a deep political, ethical and intellectual crisis. The growing political acceptance of racism, by revealing the loss or marked erosion of fundamental values and its popular impact, is shaking the intangible foundations of the democratic system in a growing number of countries.

5.   With its amalgamation of racial, cultural and religious factors, the resurgence of the racist and xenophobic culture and mentality can feed and foster a dynamic of conflicts between cultures and civilizations, which constitutes the most serious threat to world peace. Combating racism requires not only identifying its manifestations and expressions but also analysing and better understanding its underlying causes. The importance of identity constructs in the racist and xenophobic culture and mentality reflects the central focus on multiculturalism in the current rise of racism. The political and ideological context of the fight against terrorism is not only generating new forms of discrimination owing to its potential exploitation for political ends, but may also succeed in marginalizing the fight against racism owing to the political priority given to anti-terrorism.

I. SIGNIFICANT ISSUES RELATED TO THE RESURGENCE OF RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND XENOPHOBIA

A. Expressions and characteristics of the resurgence of racism

6.   The current rise of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia is confirmed by two major intrinsically related factors: their political normalization and exploitation and their intellectual legitimization.

1. Political normalization and exploitation

7.   The most alarming aspect of the impact of the resurgence of parties and groups with racist and xenophobic platforms is their insidious penetration of the political agendas of democratic parties under the pretext of combating terrorism, defending the "national identity", promoting "national preference" and combating illegal immigration. This penetration leads to a generalized acceptance of racist and xenophobic statements, writings and hence deeds. Any careful scrutiny of the political agendas of traditional democratic parties in many regions will show clear signs of how the national political agenda can be determined by racist and xenophobic parties and movements. The political rhetoric of democratic parties has been gradually borrowing the language, concepts and in the last resort the system of values of those parties. The key concepts of this rhetoric are defence, protection and conservation. Their ultimate legitimacy rests on the nation itself.

8.   In other words political agendas are increasingly focused on protecting the "national identity", "defending the national interest", safeguarding the "national heritage", giving priority to "national preference in employment", or combating "illegal foreign immigration". Against the background of the general trend towards multiculturalism in most societies, this rhetoric becomes the new political expression of discrimination and xenophobia owing to its two main political projections: a rejection or non-recognition of multiculturalism and cultural diversity and especially an identification of all those the nation needs to defend itself against, namely non-nationals, ethnic, cultural or religious minorities, immigrants and asylum-seekers. Political, social, economic and cultural discrimination constitutes the natural expression of this defensive and protective national rhetoric. Its legitimacy is assured by the fact that it is accepted and used by the traditional democratic parties. This democratic normalization of the racist and xenophobic ideology, often for electoral reasons, effectively removes any ethical objections on the part of opponents of racism by making racist and xenophobic attitudes commonplace. The most practical illustration of this transition of racist and xenophobic ideas from the outer fringes of the extreme right to democratic normality is the growing sharing of political power by xenophobic parties and their leaders through coalition governments. The bridge has then been crossed from a marginal political platform to access to the political institutions of the State and hence to the possibility of taking direct, legitimate action to transform society. Gradually the legal system, public order, education, employment and social welfare become impregnated with racist and xenophobic ideology.

2. Intellectual legitimization

9.   In previous reports the Special Rapporteur has drawn attention to the implications of Samuel Huntington's theories on the clash of civilizations and particularly the ostracism of Islam

in relation to the West. The intellectual legitimization of racism is more explicit in his last work (Who Are We?), in which he maintains that the "Latino" population and culture pose a threat to American identity.

10.   In the Special Rapporteur's view, the issue of the intellectual legitimization of racism found a particularly clear illustration in the debate about the recent unrest in the suburbs of major French cities. This legitimization has to be taken seriously for three reasons: because the originators are intellectually representative, because their explanations and comments are explicitly racist and because of the political impact of their positions. The two personalities involved are placed on the highest rungs of the intellectual ladder in France: Ms. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, who is the lifetime secretary of the loftiest intellectual institution in France, namely the Académie française, and Mr. Alain Finkielkraut, who is looked upon nowadays as one of the leading French philosophers and for some 10 years or so has been running a very popular programme on the intellectual French public radio station, France Culture.

11.   These two eminent personalities have opted for an ethnic interpretation of the recent unrest. In an interview with the Russian press, Ms. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse blames polygamy (among African families) as the main cause of the violence of young people in the suburbs. Mr. Finkielkraut is more specific, insofar as he asserted in an interview he gave to the Israeli paper *Haaretz* on 18 November 2005[2] that "the problem is that most of these youths are Black or Arabs, with a Muslim identity" and that "therefore it is clear that this is a revolt with an ethno-religious character". When asked whether the crisis was a reaction to the racism of which Arab and Black youths are the victims, he replied: "I do not believe so … people say the French [football] team is very popular because it is 'Black, White and Arab'. Actually nowadays it is 'Black-Black-Black', which makes it the laughing stock of Europe." He then highlights the role of the writing and teaching of history as one of the deep causes of racism, because they are "changing the teaching of colonial history and the history of slavery in the schools. Now they teach colonial history as an exclusively negative episode. We do not teach any more that the aim of colonization was also to educate and to bring civilization to the savages." Then Mr. Finkielkraut concludes his analysis with a classic rendering of the intellectual legitimization of racism by delegitimizing the war against racism when he states that "anti-racism will be for the twenty-first century what Communism was for the twentieth century". These views are in fact the latest expression of a recurring effort at intellectual legitimization, the political impact of which confirms a key concern of the Special Rapporteur in his reports, namely the normalization of racism through the intake of racist ideas in the political platforms of traditionally democratic parties. Three examples provide a concrete illustration. Firstly, there is the emphasis placed publicly by politicians and members of Parliament of the dominant party in the Government on the ethnic interpretation of the crisis. Secondly, there has been the adoption by the French Parliament of a bill advocating the teaching of the positive role of colonization, especially in North Africa. And thirdly, the normalization of the ideas of the extreme right-wing party, the National Front, revealed by a recent opinion poll, according to which not only do 24 per cent of French people express agreement with the National Front's ideas, but 30 per cent consider that the party "does not represent a threat to democracy".

12.   In the same spirit, according to the newspaper *Le Monde* of 18 December 2005, "the CSA opinion poll which has been conducted for 10 years by the National Consultative Commission of

Human Rights (CNCDH) on xenophobia shows a spectacular rise in the number of people declaring themselves to be racist. One French person in three describes him/herself as racist. "The voice of racism has been liberated", according to a confidential analytical note by the CNDH, a body attached to the Prime Minister's Office. An ethnic interpretation of the bomb attacks carried out in London in July 2005 has also been given by British intellectuals and the British press, which pictured them as the failure of the British multicultural model. The French Government has publicly recognized the social and economic causes of the unrest in the suburbs and has confirmed the discrimination to which the communities concerned are exposed. Generally speaking, the political normalization of racism has been strengthened by the emphasis placed on security and the criminalization of immigration and asylum-seeking issues in the legislations and political practices of many Governments.

3. The resurgence of racist violence among neo-Nazi groups

13.   The extent and the frequency of the racist and xenophobic acts of violence of neo-Nazi groups are a direct consequence of the political normalization and intellectual legitimization of racism. These groups, which were long considered to be marginal, have benefited doubly from the latest regression of the fight against racism. They have literally emerged from the backwoods of marginality by taking part in public demonstrations and events made possible by the democratic legitimization of racist and xenophobic ideas. The tolerance enjoyed by these groups is reinforced by the call for priority to be given to the fight against terrorism and to the ostracism for security reasons of non-nationals, immigrants, asylum-seekers and the believers of minority religions like Islam. There is a great temptation in this situation to exploit their ideological constructs, made up of old-fashioned identity-related nationalism, with racial overtones, of gut xenophobia, or in some countries of sectarian Christianity in order to wage battle both against multiculturalism, the new form of the old decried cosmopolitanism, and against the current terrorist foe, vaguely defined on the basis of a compounding of racial, cultural and religious factors. Finding inspiration in their imagination and their intangible racist heritage, neo-Nazi groups are launching their campaign of violence not only against foreigners, immigrants, non-nationals, ethnic and religious national minorities, Blacks, Arabs, Asians, Caucasians and Muslims, but also against Jews, the traditional figurehead of the enemy inside and racial hatred. Racist and xenophobic violence traditionally takes three forms: physical attacks on groups, the desecration of cemeteries and the profanation of religious and cultural shrines. Sporting and musical events have also become favourite venues for such violence. The rise of racism in sport and especially in football is a direct effect of the resurgence of violence among neo-Nazi groups. The rise of the racist and xenophobic violence of neo-Nazi groups is particularly alarming in most European countries, in the Russian Federation, the Baltic countries, Australia, New Zealand and in North America.

B.   The issue of multiculturalism as the determining factor of the impact of the resurgence of racism on democracy

14.   There is one striking factor which most present-day societies have in common and which considerably amplifies the impact on the democratic system of the normalization of racism and the legitimization of the racist and xenophobic ideology of extreme right-wing parties, and that is the issue of multiculturalism.

15.   Multicultural societies are the outcome of historical processes which, owing to the way in which they evolved, brought different peoples, cultures and religions into contact with each other. These encounters have taken place within the framework of a political organizational and functional structure, the nation. This structure has been organized in general around the principle of national identity as a factor of recognition, coalescence and unity. The correlation or link between these two concepts, identity and nation, provides the basis for the process of the construction of identity which, over time, through the process of history, memory, language, culture and religion, has produced a political and legal concept, the nation State, which has structured most modern societies. The nation State concept has, in general, been intellectually and ideologically conceived and implemented politically as the expression of a national identity, which exclusively reflects, according to the political context, a particular ethnic group, religion or culture.

16.   The central problem of most modern societies lies in the fundamental contradiction between the framework of the nation State, as the expression of an exclusive national identity, and the dynamic process of multiculturalization at work in these societies as a result of the growing diversity of ethnic, cultural and religious communities and groups. According to the way these societies evolved historically and to the nature of their political system, the position of each ethnic, cultural, religious or social group in society is governed either by the principle of equality or by the principle of discrimination. Historically speaking, it is the principle of discrimination which has dominated the construction of most societies. The historic dimension of this discriminatory relation may be illustrated over time by comparing the map of political, social and economic marginalization with the ethnic, cultural and religious divisions of these societies. It is in this sense that the multicultural process, which is never neutral, carries with it over time, and therefore in depth, the inequalities inherent in society.

17.   Within this context, cultural diversity has been understood and practised as establishing a radical difference and a hierarchy between races, cultures and communities. The religious or mythical legitimization of diversity and the social structures which have expressed it have thus led to the establishment of caste systems in Africa and in Asia. This hierarchical interpretation of ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity was theorized and legitimized by philosophers, intellectuals and scientists in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and exploited very deliberately by the political authorities as the ideological foundation of European colonial and imperial expansion. This hierarchical vision of humanity rests on two related concepts: the superiority of European culture and civilization and the civilizing goal of colonial domination. The societies that emerged from colonial domination are therefore all structured politically, economically and socially according to this hierarchical interpretation of diversity, particularly in the northern hemisphere, in the United States, in South America and in the Caribbean. Native communities and those of African descent have been the main victims of this process. The historic depth of the hierarchical diversity of the societies concerned is a reflection in time and space of the longevity of the feudal, colonial or imperial political systems from which they originate. Its penetration in social relations, personal attitudes and the collective subconscious is due to its justification, transmission and maturation by the dominant systems of values, education, literature and the means of information and communication.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Resurgence of racism and democratic regression

18.   The resurgence of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia reflects a major regression affecting democratic progress on account of its traditional political and ideological exploitation by extreme right-wing parties, its blatant intellectual legitimization by intellectuals and influential media, the gradual infiltration of racist and xenophobic rhetoric and platforms in the political programmes of democratic parties under the cover of waging war on terrorism and illegal immigration and defending the national identity, and the popular acceptance of racist and xenophobic culture and mentalities. New life has now been breathed into both ancient and modern forms of racism and racial discrimination.

19.   The fight against racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, in all their forms and manifestations, must constitute the keystone of the defence and consolidation of democratic progress.

20.   This fight must be built around a dual strategy: (a) a political and legal strategy based on the expression - at the highest level of political authority of Member States - of a political determination to combat racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia in all their forms, manifestations and expressions, accompanied by the ratification, implementation and legal transcription at national level of anti-racist international instruments and agreements, in particular the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action; (b) an ethical, intellectual and cultural strategy, which must now be urgently implemented in order to eradicate, on the intellectual and moral front, the deep roots of the racist and xenophobic culture and mentality through education and teaching at all levels, through information and communication media (especially the Internet), through systems of value and representation, and by condemning racist and xenophobic revisionist literature.

21.   The impact of racist and xenophobic political platforms on the political programmes of democratic parties must be warded off not only by greater political vigilance but also by establishing a constitutional, legal, juridical and administrative link between the fight against all forms of racism, discrimination and xenophobia and the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration. The temptation to criminalize immigrants and asylum-seekers and to boil the problem down to a question of security must therefore be urgently rejected, with due regard for the relevant international instruments for the defence of human rights.

2. Linking the fight against racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia with the construction of a democratic, egalitarian and interactive multiculturalism

22.   The fight against racism is linked to political recognition of the multicultural reality of all societies and the political will to transform a multicultural heritage founded on discrimination and inequality into the construction of societies governed by democratic, egalitarian and interactive multiculturalism. To achieve this the critical appraisal and

thorough overhaul of ethnocentric, exclusive and discriminatory identity constructs will require re-examining the writing and teaching of national history and promoting instead the writing and teaching of multicultural national histories and regional histories similar to the regional histories (for Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Central Asia) coordinated by UNESCO.

23.   The promotion of cultural pluralism must in this spirit underlie the organization and functioning of these multicultural societies. The Special Rapporteur reiterates in this respect the definition of pluralism given in previous reports, as the recognition, promotion and protection of cultural diversity, recognition by the political authority and in constitutional terms, protection by the law and promotion through education, information and communication. The dialectic of unity and diversity assists the fight against racism by linking the recognition of cultural and religious ethnic specificities and particularities with the promotion of interactions between the different communities on the basis of universal values.

Notes

[1] Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Mexico, Oman, Poland, Slovenia, United States and Venezuela. Some of these replies were delayed.

[2] Extracts of the interview given by Alain Finkielkraut to *Haaretz*, translated from the English and published in *Le Monde* of 24 November 2005.